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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 000985

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TAGS: PGOV PREL EAID MARR AF RU

SUBJECT: PRESSING RUSSIA TO ASSIST US IN AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. MOSCOW 746
1B. MOSCOW 416
1C. MOSCOW 833
1D. MOSCOW 818
1E. WASKIN TO YATES EMAIL 04/06/09
1F. STATE 31102
1G. MOSCOW 329

Classified By: DCM Eric Rubin for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) Summary: Significant Russian assistance to stabilize Afghanistan remains a possibility that will require continued engagement by the U.S. Our dialogue with Russia has produced some positive results, with the GOR allowing the transit of non-military material to ISAF and offering to expand this to include lethal equipment, but many of our proposed areas for cooperation remain stalled. While expressing willingness to donate military equipment to Afghanistan, Russia continues to press for weapons sales. Russian interest in rebuilding Afghan infrastructure has not moved forward quickly, and Moscow keeps suggesting that others provide the funding. Russia's interest in contributing to Afghanistan is partially driven by its desire to use the issue to gauge the state of Russia-U.S. relations. In that regard, the GOR has proposed creating a special mechanism to sustain a bilateral dialogue on Afghanistan. An Afghanistan sub-group within the CTWG or the security issues framework may provide us with an appropriate forum to press Moscow to put its money where its mouth is, and start providing more concrete assistance to Afghanistan. End summary.

Engaging Russia on Afghanistan

12. (C) The MFA told us that FM Lavrov came away from his March 6 meeting with the Secretary impressed with the Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategic Review, and that he submitted to President Medvedev a formal proposal to expand Russian cooperation with the U.S. and NATO (ref A). The U.S. and Russia also held bilateral consultations on Afghanistan February 10, and the U.S. attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) March 27 conference on Afghanistan in Moscow, the first formal U.S. engagement with the SCO (refs B and C). Such efforts have had positive results, with the GOR offering to expand the NATO transit agreement to include military and lethal equipment bound for ISAF. Moscow considers the transit agreement a significant contribution to Afghanistan, and has used it to argue that Russia should be included in meetings of contributors to ISAF, which includes non-troop contributing countries and international organizations.

13. (C) Our efforts to date show that turning Moscow's rhetoric into reality is difficult. Despite repeated U.S. explanations that nearly all weapons supplied to Afghanistan have been donated, the GOR keeps pressing for Russian weapons purchases by the U.S. or others (refs B and D). Earlier Russian enthusiasm to reconstruct Afghan infrastructure has

become lukewarm, and our encouragement for Russian firms to bid on contracts to rebuild Soviet-era facilities has been met by GOR suggestions that USAID award these contracts to Russia as a political gesture (refs B and E). Efforts to get Russia to be more responsive to delisting requests in the UN 1267 Committee have been met by insistence that more information on the subjects be provided.

¶ 14. (C) When we recently delivered ref E non-paper requesting specific contributions to Afghanistan to MFA Afghan desk chief Vitaliy Rugalyov, he explained that Moscow views Afghanistan through the prism of its relationship with Washington, and sees our expanded engagement on the issue primarily as an indicator of improved bilateral ties. We explained to Rugalyov that while the U.S. recognizes cooperation with Russia on Afghanistan as a significant means to improve our relationship, the U.S. priority is stabilizing a country to which we are about to commit over 17,000 additional troops, and our engagement with Russia on this issue is intended to help gather additional resources to accomplish this goal.

Cold War Thinking Blocks Russian Aid

¶ 15. (C) Rugalyov told us that a Cold War mentality existed among influential figures in the Russian military and security establishment that caused them to recommend against assisting the stabilization of Afghanistan, which would be a form of assistance to the U.S. They see Afghanistan as an "occupied country" and an "American project." These individuals argue that sending military or civilian

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assistance to Afghanistan will end up in U.S. hands. Rugalyov said that he was shocked to hear how openly these views were expressed within segments of the GOR, and believed that some of these individuals genuinely want the U.S. to fail in Afghanistan. Rugalyov contended that the MFA stood in opposition to these unreformed cold warriors. FM Lavrov is an articulate proponent of the need for Russia to assist the U.S. and NATO in Afghanistan, and Medvedev was sympathetic to his argument. This way of thinking about Afghanistan, and cooperation with the U.S. in general, was in the ascendancy, especially as bilateral relations improved. Rugalyov recommended that the best way for the U.S. to help support Lavrov's argument, and Medvedev's inclination, for Russia to play a role in Afghanistan is for Washington to continue its high-level engagement with Moscow on the issue.

Russia Wants a Special Dialogue

¶ 16. (C) Rugalyov informed us that the GOR was interested in establishing a formal mechanism for dialogue on Afghanistan that could facilitate Russian assistance. Such a mechanism was included in Lavrov's recent proposal to Medvedev to expand cooperation on Afghanistan. (Note: DFM Borodavkin expressed a similar idea to SCA DAS for Afghanistan Moon during their February 10 meeting, ref G.) When we suggested the NATO-Russia Council as an appropriate forum, Rugalyov stressed that Moscow saw the U.S. as the real decision-maker on Afghan issues and desired direct dialogue with Washington.

Moscow is looking for a "signal" that the U.S. wants, and values, Russian cooperation on Afghanistan beyond the consultations already held. In addition to creating a permanent mechanism for discussion, Rugalyov suggested that Washington make "a political decision" to award an infrastructure rehabilitation project, even a small one, to a Russian firm, to help overcome Russian reluctance to engage more directly in the country.

Infrastructure Rehabilitation

¶ 17. (C) Rugalyov cast doubt upon the interest, or ability, of

Russian companies to undertake USAID-funded infrastructure reconstruction projects in Afghanistan, citing their concern over security and lack of understanding of the USG contracting process. He agreed with the suggestion made by MFA Department for International Organizations Deputy Director Dmitri Maksimichev to USAID Moscow Director Waskin during their March 16 meeting that the U.S. give the contract to rehabilitate the Salang Tunnel to the Russian firm Zarubezhtransstroy without competitive bidding because it is best qualified to do the work as the company that built the tunnel during the Soviet period (ref E). Rugalyov advised that the company had all the original plans for the tunnel, and would not make them available without getting the contract.

Russian Development Assistance

¶ 8. (C) Rugalyov doubted that the GOR would begin a large-scale development assistance program for Afghanistan in the near future, and would continue to provide modest deliveries of wheat and other in-kind assistance through the Russian Ministry of Civil Defense and Emergency Situations. This year, in honor of the twentieth anniversary of the withdrawal of the last Soviet forces from Afghanistan, the Ministry plans to ship 7,000 tons of wheat and provide vehicles, including 50 Kamaz trucks for the central government in Kabul and two fire-fighting vehicles to the Balkh provincial government. In March, the Ministry sent 40 metric tons of aid, including foodstuffs, clothing and tents, some of which was supplied by a Russian veterans' organization. Rugalyov explained that funding for aid deliveries came from the GOR's general fund and not ministerial budgets. Russia is skeptical of large development projects such as road building, which, Rugalyov argued, are seen by Afghans as a means to assist ISAF's fight against insurgents. The GOR prefers small projects that have a direct impact on the lives of ordinary people, and will provide limited funding for local health and education programs.

Military Assistance in the form of AK-47s

¶ 9. (C) Rugalyov explained that the MFA has been pushing for significant GOR assistance to the Afghan military, but has been stymied by the MOD's preference for arms sales. He shrugged off any suggestion that Russia could come through

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with the \$200 million in military assistance for the Afghan army that the MFA has been talking about since 2007. The MFA was optimistic that Russia would provide 50,000 AK-47s requested recently by the Afghan MOI, and recommended providing an initial batch of weapons as a donation. The issue currently stood with the MOD; if it blocked the AK-47s, FM Lavrov intended to appeal the decision to Medvedev. Rugalyov explained that the MOD was concerned that there is no mechanism in place to ensure the proper use of the AK-47s, fearing that some might be sold by the Afghans or fall into the hands of extremists. We reiterated the U.S. recommendation that all military transfers to the Afghans be coordinated through CSTC-A, which would ensure the proper storage and use of these weapons.

Comment

¶ 10. (C) Although Russia claims an equal seat at the table on high-profile foreign policy issues, it has yet to pony up the commensurate resources, reserving assistance for countries where it perceives Russia's major interests lie, such as post-Soviet states. Moscow also sees the assistance it has provided to Afghanistan through the transit agreement as a significant contribution justifying special recognition from the U.S. Therefore, we will have to keep up the pressure to

encourage Russia to follow through on additional assistance. We recommend establishing a bilateral working-level Afghanistan sub-group, under the CTWG or the security issues framework, to continue the dialogue already underway between Moscow and Washington to push forward specific areas of Russian military and development assistance to Afghanistan. This should be complemented by high-level visits by Special Representative Holbrooke and General Petraeus.

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